

Beginning of Jewish New Year Signals Time to Redouble Efforts for Fair and Humane Immigration Policy

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Washington D.C.) Today, as the House of Representatives prepares to recess and turn its focus to the priorities of a new Congress, and Jews across the world prepare to celebrate the beginning of a new year, Hispanic and Jewish Members of Congress proudly announced a shared commitment to immigrants of all faiths and backgrounds.

In a statement signed by 20 U.S. Representatives, including Chicago Reps Rahm Emanuel (IL-05) and Luis V. Gutierrez (IL-04), Members declared that, "It is in this spirit of our shared experiences and common goals that we put forth our shared priorities for fair and workable immigration reform."

The shared statement outlines Members' intentions to focus on reform that: secures our borders; secures a legal workforce through an accurate employment verification system; requires undocumented immigrants to apply for legal status, pass rigorous background checks, pay back taxes and learn English; condemns inefficient enforcement tools, such as poorly planned workplace raids; keeps families together; and ensures that abusive employers are not allowed to exploit the system by denying Americans jobs and taking advantage of vulnerable immigrants.

"As Jews and Hispanics, we share an experience that defines our history and reflects our families' roots—the experience of being a 'stranger in a strange land,'" said Rep. Gutierrez. "By signing this statement on immigration reform, we communicate to our constituents and the American people that, despite our diversity, we are committed to transforming our broken immigration system into one that reflects our diverse origins, respects our communities' history and values our country's identity as a nation of immigrants."

"This affirmation of our shared commitment comes at a particularly poignant time," said Rep. Emanuel. "Beginning tonight, Jews all over the world will celebrate Rosh Hashanah and look inward to evaluate actions of the past and good intentions for the future. For all of us, this reflects the turning of a new leaf and a renewed commitment to policies that reflect the highest standard of kindness, justice and humanity towards one another."

The full text of the statement is below.

Statement on Immigration

Hispanic and Jewish Members of Congress

September 29, 2008

As Jews and Hispanics, we share an experience that defines our histories and reflects our families' roots—the experience of being a "stranger in a strange land." Today we express our commitment to immigrants of all faiths and backgrounds. After all, as the Old Testament teaches—we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

In addition to being Hispanics and Jews, we are also members of Congress. As a result, we are responsible for legislation to safeguard the fair and humane treatment of all people, and we have the best interests of our communities and all Americans at heart.

It is in this spirit of our shared experiences and common goals that we put forth our shared priorities for fair and workable immigration reform.

Our policies must hold employers who do not comply with the law accountable and empower the federal government to swiftly investigate and root out bad-acting employers who flout our labor and immigration laws. Securing a legal workforce also depends on an employment verification system that accurately and efficiently identifies eligible new hires.

We also fully support securing our borders. Strong borders require an adequate supply of manpower, groundbreaking technology and sensible infrastructure that regulates the flow of people and goods while doing no harm to local communities or the environment.

Enforcement alone, however, no matter how well formulated or funded, is doomed to fail. We cannot deport our way out of this problem.

Poorly planned raids intended to grab headlines are a not only a waste of taxpayer money, but they also are an inefficient enforcement tool that displace U.S. workers, interrupt laborers from organizing, tear apart American families, and destroy neighborhoods and towns. The blame cannot simply be placed on undocumented workers; abusive employers who violate our immigration laws must be held accountable.

As Jews and Hispanics, we are called to welcome the stranger in our midst. In policy terms, this means that we must look upon the estimated 12 million undocumented individuals living among us not with scorn, but with compassion, as we require them to come forward, apply for legal status, pass rigorous background checks, pay back taxes, learn English and fully integrate into the mainstream economy and American society. Dealing fully and humanely with the undocumented living in the United States is key to realistic and effective immigration reform that protects the homeland and is consistent with our traditions and values.

In order to strengthen our country in the future, we must also institute reforms that, unlike those of the past, prevent illegal immigration.

We need an immigration system that reflects our family values: parents and children and husbands and wives should be together rather than separated by antiquated laws and bureaucratic processing. The fair and swift reunification of families in the United States would eliminate the incentive to break visa rules or risk one's life crossing a remote border to be with a loved one.

Current legal channels for immigration to the U.S. are also insufficient to provide many employers with the workers they need. Established worker programs should better fill workforce gaps and protect the jobs, wages and working conditions of Americans. For too long the absence of legal channels for low-skilled workers has served as a ready tool for abusive employers to deny Americans jobs and exploit vulnerable immigrants trying to feed their families.

Our nation was founded on the premise that, no matter one's origins, each person can better his or her lot in life. From the tenements of the Lower East Side to the border towns in Texas and Arizona, this nation was built on the sweat and toil of immigrants. Whether crossing the Atlantic or the Rio Grande, the American Dream comes at an often-perilous cost, and is realized only with hard work and determination. Immigrants do not come to America because it is easy; they come to America to work hard and achieve the American Dream, if only we will let them.

Rep. Rahm Emanuel

Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez

Rep. Joe Baca

Rep. Henry A. Waxman

Rep. Silvestre Reyes

Rep. Gary Ackerman

Rep. Jose E. Serrano

Rep. Jan Schakowsky

Rep. Albio Sires

Rep. Ruben Hinojosa

Rep. Xavier Becerra

Rep. Lucile Roybal-Allard

Rep. Nydia Velazquez

Rep. John Salazar

Rep. Hilda Solis

Rep. Grace Napolitano

Rep. Raul Grijalva

Rep. Solomon Ortiz

Rep. Ed Pastor

Rep. Howard Berman

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